

Chris Hewitt—Transcription 3.25.98
Interview—Armistead Maupin

CH: Ok, I'm pointing the mic at you because I have a loud voice, so...what I wanted to ask you was, you wrote about San Francisco in the 70's...

AM: And into the 80's.

CH: And in the 80's.

AM: Yeah, I often, you know, now get described as someone who wrote about the pre-AIDS era in the 80's but in fact my novels are divided, the *Tales of the City* novels are half and half, pre-AIDS and post-AIDS.

CH: What are the main changes you see in ^{San Francisco} ~~the ???~~ since AIDS? ~~Do you understand?~~

AM: That's always a tough one to be glib about. ~~So much of it has to do,~~ ^Sso many of the changes have to do with changes in the city itself or changes in one's own life, the process of growing up. I will say that I've always resented the popularly held notion in the mainstream media that AIDS was the wakeup call for flighty, irresponsible gay men. The suggestion that AIDS was the thing that taught us how to love and have families and be connected to one another. We were perfectly adept at that before AIDS came along.

CH: That's right.

AM: I tried to reflect that in *More Tales of the City*, the novel that is currently being filmed, by showing a relationship in which one of the partners gets ^{????} and the other resolves to take care of him until he's better. We had a big ~~big~~ ^{HAV} discussion about that illness when we first started to film *More Tales* because some people felt that any discussion of illness in the late 70's would immediately cause the audience to think of AIDS, and that the audience in turn would either ~~would~~ find a non-fatal illness to be anti-climactic or a cheat in some way. But I was determined that we keep the story line intact because I wanted to show that we've always been getting sick from all sorts of things and that many people have risen to the occasion. It's interesting in the two years since we discussed that aspect of the story the prospect for people with AIDS has changed so dramatically that the notion of an illness that doesn't prove to take a life is now far more acceptable than it would have been at the height of AIDS panic.

CH: I moved here in 94 and I lived here ^{Pall} 76 to 79. So when I came back, my friends from years ago said there's a ~~pull ???~~ over the city. And I personally didn't feel it. It felt pretty much the same to me. Of course I hadn't been here to lose so many friends to AIDS because I was in New York where there was a little bit of a lag in the virus, and the big crisis came there later in the 80s.

- AM: I used to bristle when I would go on book tours in Europe and other parts of the United States; and when the name San Francisco came up, the interviewer would invariably say, "That must be a really terrible place to live now." And there were several subtexts to that question. One suggested that the party was finally over and that we were getting our just desserts.
- CH: Yeah, that I hate.
- AM: The other subtext was that AIDS was only a reality in a place like San Francisco. So I spent most of my time having to say that this was a worldwide epidemic and that whoever was interviewing me should not make the mistake of distancing himself from what was happening in San Francisco.
- CH: Over and over again I've had to do...in reviews I say this is not a gay disease. Other people are getting it, have gotten it. Children die of it. You know, it is not specifically gay.
- AM: Well, there's always been a reason for people to want to distance themselves from the disease. In the old days, by that I mean the very early 80s, there were plenty of gay men running around saying, "I only go to sweater bars; therefore, I'm not likely to catch it." *Tales of the City* was the...rather *More Tales of the City* was the first place that...let me see, how do I phrase this? Because I was writing the serial on a daily basis in the *Chronicle*, I could reflect day-to-day events as they happened, and I was able to react to AIDS as soon as it came into my life. So when a very close friend of mine died of AIDS, of numosistis pneumonia specifically, in 1982, I made the decision to include AIDS as part of the story line in *Tales of the City*. So when John Fielding was shown to have died off-stage in the beginning of that novel, he became the first AIDS death in the history of fiction. The epidemic had not been written about in a fictional way anywhere else before that time.
- CH: Not even in plays really. I mean I saw *Falsettos*, and they never say it's AIDS in *Falsettos*. The guy dies, and you think, "What's he dying of?" And there's an assumption because they're gay. But that's the only assumption. The word is never mentioned.
- AM: I don't know the date of *Falsettos*. I think there probably some plays that preceded my work. And I'm proud of the fact that I was out of the gate so early, but it was really an accident because I had a forum that allowed me to comment on whatever was affecting my life. I was able to do the same thing with the Anita Bryant anti-gay crusade only a day after she announced the launch of her "Save Our Children" campaign.
- CH: If you have to have AIDS, this is the best place to have it. I know it sounds like a terrible thing to say...
- AM: I think if you have to have anything, this is the best place to have it. Because this is a city that recognizes diversity. That is a much maligned word these days, but it does in fact celebrate and overlook human differences as well as any place on earth.



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CH: Right, this is why I'm here.

AM: My friend, Tamara Detreaux, who inspired *Maybe the Moon* said she was far more comfortable in San Francisco than she was anywhere in the world because people simply accepted who she was and did not heap inordinate amounts of scorn or pity on her.

CH: People get beneath the surface quicker I think. You're just a person. On the outside, appearance isn't very important.

AM: When you live in a place that literally confuses you as to the nature of human identity and sexuality and gender, you start examining the human heart more closely for it's contents. It's just that simple.

CH: And there's more ^{openness} ~~???~~. You know I've found a big difference between here and New York where if you've already lived here and then live in New York, it's such a shock to see how positive ^{we do} ~~this~~ is and how prejudicial ^{over there} it is compared to here. I felt much more patronized. I found it much more difficult to come out to people there. I felt much more of a freak. I got more stares, more ^{and experienced} prejudice behavior there than I do here. Even though there of course they all think they're terribly out and terribly liberal. ^{gays} ~~the artsy gay~~ ^{may}

AM: I was shocked when I went to New York in the late 70s because I was so full of myself as a recently out gay man that I thought surely everyone in this great metropolitan center would be celebrating this with me. And I felt as if I had farted in an elevator whenever I casually happened to mention my homosexuality. And I'm talking about a group of people who fancy themselves tremendously liberal and sophisticated. I also discovered that a large number of famous gay people in New York went to public social events with a beard as a date. And while people prided themselves on knowing privately that someone was gay, they found it perfectly alright for them to keep up the pretense of heterosexuality. So my impatience with the closet was regarded as bad manners, and it still is in certain circles.

CH: Right...I'm giving a reading at Grace Cathedral next week. Somebody wanted to bring...some ~~married couple~~, straight married couples and ^{but} ~~there~~ children who are affected by my bone condition which is called osteogenesis imperfecta. And I thought that would be wonderful...

AM: Is this similar to brittle bone disease?

CH: That's what it is. And the person who invited me said, "Will there be anything that isn't Family Values?"

AM: (Laughing) By which they meant, "Are you going to turn into a big queer in front of us?"

CH: Am I going to come in a dress? And so...I said, I'm not going to make the pretense that I'm not gay. I'm not going to cut out the bits of my autobiography where I talk about a boyfriend or having a crush on a teacher. ⁺ ³³

- AM: Of course not, and I wouldn't think that anyone at Grace Cathedral would mind if you did either. They certainly shouldn't; half of them are queers themselves.
- CH: Well, it's just that there is an osteogenesis imperfecta foundation which tends to be centered around the nuclear family ~~and~~ from the suburbs basically.
- AM: I was fascinated to discover when I was the keynote speaker at the Little People of America convention several years ago that that organization is ruled by a very heavily Republican conservative core. And that the little people who are queer within that organization have to have their own subculture which is very secretive.
- CH: Which is why I don't go to them actually. I think it's a wonderful idea getting us together, but on the other hand not if I'm going to have to shock everybody.
- AM: I was whisked off to a side room at the Marriott Hotel in Denver by several little people who brought in the one out lesbian in the organization who played me a tune on the guitar. And six or eight of us and their significant others sat there and had what amounted to a cell meeting of queers. And I completely horrified the group, and by the group I mean the entire organization, in the course of my address...I horrified the larger assembly of the organization when I told them I was delighted to see that they had brought their children there and making them feel comfortable about who they were, and that I hope they would extend that to their sexuality. Because some of those very children that were there today are going to grow up to be gay kids, are going to grow up to be gay. And ~~there~~ ^{they're} going to need your understanding about that just as certainly as they're going to need your guidance because of their size.
- CH: That's why I'm writing my book. Not only are there hardly any books about little people, I've never seen one about a little gay person.
- AM: No, I don't think there is one personally. I actually had someone come up to me in a bookstore in New York and say, "When are you going to do that?"
- CH: What got you interested in little people?
- AM: One of my good friends, Tamara Detreaux. Tammy was a little person, in fact at one point she claimed to hold the title of the shortest woman in the world. I'm not sure how long she held it or who put her in the Guinness Book. I knew her ever since a day we met on a bay cruise when she was nineteen years old. And one day she called me up and said she was going to run away from home, which was in San Leandro, and seek her fortune in Hollywood. And she told me she wanted my blessing. So I told her I would give it to her if she called me with regular reports. For a long time, she didn't get work. She worked as a DJ in a punk disco in the valley. And for awhile, she sang backup to Bud Court when he a group called *Bud Court and the Midflies*. And then one day she called up and said, "I can't believe I'm telling you this, but I have a

role in Steven Spielberg's next film." And she had been sworn to secrecy so it took me several months before I found out that she had been chosen to wear the rubber suit of ET in all the scenes that required movement on the part of ET. And yet, this was a very curious kind of theme, because her face was never seen, and in fact she was simply providing the life for a creature who would get all the glory. After talking to her for awhile, I realized that an awful lot of little people in Hollywood are employed in just this way. And I was intrigued by the notion of exploring the implied metaphor in that. The idea that some people are acceptable only if they wear rubber suits and charm us. And I think almost everybody has some sort of rubber suit that he or she feels that he must wear.

CH: I think that goes for disability in general. I mean, people don't want to see it.

AM: They don't want to see it.

CH ...at the same time there is a repulsion/attraction going on. I get stared at all the time. But on the other hand people don't mind being so far away, but they don't want to be too close.

AM: When my partner, Terry, and I went to Denver for the LPA convention, we went out to breakfast one day, and there was a whole family of little people at the table next to us; and two tables further down the line was a big, strapping American nuclear family all of whom had turned their chairs around to stare at the table of little people. And they made no pretense whatsoever about doing anything else. And Terry got so angry about it, he eventually turned his chair around and started staring at the nuclear family, until they finally said what is the problem; and he said, "I thought you'd like to know what it feels like."

CH: ...to be stared at.

AM: I wrote a screenplay...I adapted *Maybe the Moon* as a film two years ago.

CH: Is that coming out anytime?

AM: Well, no, because we can't find anybody who wants to make it. I'm repeatedly praised for the script. I'm told that it's funny and that it's moving and profound. But invariably Hollywood producers say to me, "Who's going to go to a movie that stars a little person?" When the script was sent to ~~Mira~~ ^{Maire} Sorvino by our producer with the idea of her playing the little person's best friend, she sent it back with the remark, "I don't intend to play second fiddle to a midget." Which took Ms. Sorvino off my list of admired actresses right off the bat.

CH: I've had the same kind of thing. One time I was standing in line at the movies and there happened to be another little person standing in line, this was in New York, and a man came up with his girlfriend and the man said, "I don't want to go to this movie; it's crawling with midgets." Right in front of me. And she turned to him and said, "What a terrible thing to say." And she

gave him hell, ^{you} You know, so I didn't have to say anything. But, no, it's surprising, there is a lot of prejudice still. And then one time I had a man come up to me on the street and said, "I would give you a quarter; but since you're so small, I'll give you a dime."

AM: (Laughing) Oh my ~~God~~!

CH: I mean it is a good line, ^{but} It is very offensive.

AM: Jesus Christ! I'm sure you spent the next two days thinking of a comeback for that.

CH: Yeah, I know, I know. But you always think later of the comeback. And this man who was standing behind me heard him and punched him and said, "That's a terrible thing to say." But, this is why I'm here. And anyway we have to get back on our focus here.

AM: Well, what is our focus? It's just fun talking. Really, everything we're talking about is central to the themes of my work because I have always tried to address the idea that in spite of our different outsides, ~~that~~ ^{It's} our insides are very much the same. As a very old fashioned, some would even say corny concept, but it's the way I've always tried to live my life, or at least my adult life. And I've always tried to address that theme in my work.

CH: Were you brought up Christian?

AM: I was brought up Episcopalian. But in an extremely racist, misogynistic atmosphere.

CH: Was that in the ~~S~~outh?

AM: Yeah, my father was still fighting the Civil War, and there was a lot of lose and ugly talk about "uppity niggers" and "pushy Jews". And the fairy nice fellows that my mother would act in plays with at the Raleigh Little Theater. And it took me a very long time to realize that the racism that I carried as part of my legacy was identical to the oppression that I felt because of my homosexuality. I don't think I phrased that right. In the process of coming out, I realized that if I didn't want other people to be unkind to me then I better bloody well start figuring out the ways I was unkind to other people, consciously and otherwise.

CH: Is San Francisco a racist city do you think?

AM: Oh, I think every place is racist, but I think that we ^{try} ~~tried~~ harder than most places to see that we're not. Sometimes we make ourselves ridiculous in the process, issuing edicts...

CH: Being overly politically correct.

- AM: Yes, but at least we're trying. And at least it indicates our intention to see to it that all of humanity is celebrated.
- CH: The reason I ask is that I have ^{gay} African American friends who have lived here and in New York, and they find it more racist here, more difficult to be here. Of course, there are less minorities here. In New York, it is more of a melting pot. It is not, as Mayor Dinkins said, a "wonderful quilt." It's more like a boiling stew I think. But nevertheless, they say it's easier. But those, the African American's I know are ^{subject to} accept a double stigma. You know it is very hard for them. It's one thing to be black and accepted ^{and another} than being black and gay and accepted ^{and yet another} than being black and gay with AIDS and being accepted. I loved, and I'm sure I can speak for most people when I say this, the letter that you ~~write~~ to your parents that I feel every gay man should have written to their parents about coming out. ~~What would you say, what advice would you give to a gay man today who has not yet come out to his family?~~
- AM: Let me back up a little bit and tell you first of all that that letter was in fact my letter to my own parents.
- CH: Yeah, that's what I thought. It's wonderful.
- AM: I used it in my fiction, but in fact when my parents read the letter in the serial in the newspaper at the time, they realized that I was speaking about my own life. And the letter, which we've just filmed almost in its entirety, took me less time to write than anything I've ever written because I've ~~been~~ ^{not} been saving it up for so long. As to the advice I would offer, I can't be much clearer than I've always been—your life will be better if you ~~will, when, if you~~ choose to honest, if you choose to present yourself exactly the way you are. Several things will happen. You may repel some people, but the ones you repel are the ones you don't want in your life in the first place. And in the process of claiming your own dignity by telling the truth, you will take command of your life for the first time ever. And extraordinary worlds will open up to you.
- CH: Well, I came out to my mother last year at the age of 50, and it was wonderful. And she was wonderful. And I realized that ~~what~~ that the reason I hadn't done it before was that I was projecting my own homophobia on her which she didn't actually have. I mean she wasn't thrilled, but she knew anyway. And she was fine about it.
- AM: The world doesn't hate fags nearly as much as some fags hate themselves. And when I figured that out, everything changed for me. I became a writer because I was able to look more closely into every corner of my heart; and in doing so, I could understand other people better. I learned to write about heterosexuals after I accepted myself as a gay man.
- CH: Exactly. I don't think I could ever have begun my book...I couldn't understand why I couldn't write this book until after I came out to my mother. Now it's so obvious. I used to be afraid my mother was going to see a column of mine

in some gay magazine in England. First of all, in my village you couldn't get one anyway. Second of all, if she saw it she probably wouldn't have bought it. And third of all, the likelihood of anybody telling her is totally, totally impossible. And now, you know, it means that I can send out anywhere I want, to any gay publication. ~~That~~ I can say anything about myself to anybody in print and I feel it doesn't matter. I don't give a damn. And I feel, like you said, that I've become myself. I didn't realize that coming out was about me. I thought it was about other people. It's about me.

AM: It's entirely about you.

CH: It's entirely about me.

AM: And I'm constantly shocked at how many bright and attractive young men are still suffering under this kind of deception.

CH: And are not out to their parents.

AM: Are not out. Yesterday I was admiring a couple of dogs on the street who were attached by a leash to a very handsome, hunky young guy.

CH: As is often the way in San Francisco.

AM: He recognized me and told me he enjoyed my books. And I asked him if the dogs took much care and what he did with them when he had to go out of town on a business trip. And he said, "Well," and then he lowered his voice as if he were about to tell me something scandalous, and said, "I live with my ex lover." And then he caught himself and said, "I don't know why I'm whispering in San Francisco." And I said, "I sure as hell don't know why you are either, and I certainly don't know why you're whispering to me." And I walked away thinking he started out looking tremendously sexy to me and he ended up seeming like not a man at all. The only people on this planet who are truly attractive are the people who are confident about who they are and what they have to offer and have found something in themselves that they can love profoundly.

CH: Yes, who have found some peace with that. Yeah.

AM: Absolutely. And you know all of the desperation of these steroid pumped bodies at a white party in Miami can't cover up for ^{is} that emptiness and that insecurity. When people haven't come to terms with who they are.

CH: Tell me about *More Tales of the City* and when is it...Is it being serialized now? Is it coming out soon?

AM: It has already been filmed and will have its premier on Showtime on June 7th and 8th. They'll run three hours the first night and three hours the second night so it can be a real event and people can plan parties around it and that sort of thing. And we're also holding a number of sneak previews across the country under the auspices of GLAAD.

CH: GLAAD being?

AM: The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. There will be a premier in both Los Angeles and in San Francisco and a special showing at the Museum of Television in New York.

CH: When can we expect to see it on our tv screens?

AM: June 7th and 8th. And then it'll run all summer long on Showtime. So I would encourage people to get their Showtime subscriptions early and tell Showtime why you're subscribing because that would encourage them to continue with the series. Jerry Ofsay ???, the President of Programming, has already indicated publicly that they plan to follow these characters through the twelve years of their existence if there is an adequate response from the public to ~~More Tales of the City~~.

CH: ~~What about QTV? Are they going to do it? Do you think it is necessary to have a queer television station or not?~~

AM: ~~No. Oh, I don't know. What is it exactly? You're talking about a cable tv station or something?~~

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- CH: Ok, I'm pointing the mic at you because I have a loud voice, so...what I wanted to ask you was, you wrote about San Francisco in the 70's...
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I'm not sure how long she held it or who put her in the Guinness Book. I knew her ever since a day we met on a bay cruise when she was nineteen years old. And one day she called me up and said she was going to run away from home, which was in San Leandro, and seek her fortune in Hollywood. And she told me she wanted my blessing. So I told her I would give it to her if she called me with regular reports. For a long time, she didn't get work. She worked as a DJ in a punk disco in the valley. And for awhile, she sang backup to Bud Court when he had a group called *Bud Court and the Midflies*. And then one day she called up and said, "I can't believe I'm telling you this, but I have a role in Steven Spielberg's next film." And she had been sworn to secrecy so it took me several months before I found out that she had been chosen to wear the rubber suit of ET in all the scenes that required movement on the part of ET. And yet, this was a very curious kind of theme, because her face was never seen, and in fact she was simply providing the life for a creature who would get all the glory. After talking to her for awhile, I realized that an awful lot of little people in Hollywood are employed in just this way. And I was intrigued by the notion of exploring the implied metaphor in that. The idea that some people are acceptable only if they wear rubber suits and charm us. And I think almost everybody has some sort of rubber suit that he or she feels that he must wear.

CH: I think that goes for disability in general. I mean, people don't want to see it.

AM: They don't want to see it.

CH ...at the same time there is a repulsion/attraction going on. I get stared at all the time. But on the other hand people don't mind being so far away, but they don't want to be too close.

AM: When my partner, Terry, and I went to Denver for the LPA convention, we went out to breakfast one day, and there was a whole family of little people at the table next to us; and two tables further down the line was a big, strapping American nuclear family all of whom had turned their chairs around to stare at the table of little people. And they made no pretense whatsoever about doing anything else. And Terry got so angry about it, he eventually turned his chair around and starting staring at the nuclear family, until they finally said what is the problem; and he said, "I thought you'd like to know what it feels like."

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AM: I wrote a screenplay...I adapted *Maybe the Moon* as a film two years ago.

CH: Is that coming out anytime?

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AM: (Laughing) Oh my God!

CH: I mean it is a good line, but it is very offensive.

AM: Jesus Christ. I'm sure you spent the next two days thinking of a comeback for that.

CH: Yeah, I know, I know. But you always think later of the comeback. And this man who was standing behind me heard him and punched him and said, "That's a terrible thing to say." But, this is why I'm here. And anyway we have to get back on our focus here.

AM: Well, what is our focus? It's just fun talking. Really, everything we're talking about is central to the themes of my work because I have always tried to address the idea that in spite of our different outsides, our insides are very much the same. It's a very old fashioned, some would even say corny concept, but it's the way I've always tried to live my life or at least my adult life. And I've always tried to address that theme in my work.

CH: Were you brought up Christian?

AM: I was brought up Episcopalian. But in an extremely racist, misogynistic atmosphere.

CH: Was that in the South?

AM: Yeah, my father was still fighting the Civil War, and there was a lot of lose and ugly talk about "uppity niggers" and "pushy Jews." And the fairy nice fellows that my mother would act in plays with at the Raleigh Little Theater. And it took me a very long time to realize that the racism that I carried as part of my legacy was identical to the oppression that I felt because of my homosexuality. I don't think I phrased that right. In the process of coming

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CH: The reason I ask is that I have gay African American friends who have lived here and in New York, and they find it more racist here, more difficult to be here. Of course, there are less minorities here. In New York, it is more of a melting pot. It is not, as Mayor Dinkins said, a "wonderful quilt." It's more like a boiling stew I think. But nevertheless, they say it's easier. But those, the gay African Americans I know are subject to a double stigma. You know it is very hard for them. It's one thing to be black and accepted and another being black and gay and accepted and yet another being black and gay with AIDS and being accepted. I loved, and I'm sure I can speak for most people when I say this, the letter that you wrote to your parents that I feel every gay man should have written to their parents about coming out. What advice would you give to a gay man today who has not yet come out to his family?

AM: Let me back up a little bit and tell you first of all that that letter was in fact my letter to my own parents.

CH: Yeah, that's what I thought. It's wonderful.

AM: I used it in my fiction, but in fact when my parents read the letter in the serial in the newspaper at the time, they realized that I was speaking about my own life. And the letter, which we've just filmed almost in its entirety, took me less time to write than anything I've ever written because I'd been saving it up for so long. As to the advice I would offer, I can't be much clearer than I've always been—your life will be better if you choose to be honest, if you choose to present yourself exactly the way you are. Several things will happen. You may repel some people, but the ones you repel are the ones you don't want in your life in the first place. And in the process of claiming your own dignity by telling the truth, you will take command of your life for the first time ever. And extraordinary worlds will open up to you.

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actually have. I mean she wasn't thrilled, but she knew anyway. And she was fine about it.

AM: The world doesn't hate fags nearly as much as some fags hate themselves. And when I figured that out, everything changed for me. I became a writer because I was able to look more closely into every corner of my heart; and in doing so, I could understand other people better. I learned to write about heterosexuals after I accepted myself as a gay man.

CH: Exactly. I don't think I could ever have begun my book...I couldn't understand why I couldn't write this book until after I came out to my mother. Now it's so obvious. I used to be afraid my mother was going to see a column of mine in some gay magazine in England. First of all, in my village you couldn't get one anyway. Second of all, if she saw it she probably wouldn't have bought it. And third of all, the likelihood of anybody telling her is totally, totally impossible. And now, you know, it means that I can send out anywhere I want, to any gay publication. I can say anything about myself to anybody in print and I feel it doesn't matter. I don't give a damn. And I feel, like you said, that I've become myself. I didn't realize that coming out was about me. I thought it was about other people. It's about me.

AM: It's entirely about you.

CH: It's entirely about me.

AM: And I'm constantly shocked at how many bright and attractive young men are still suffering under this kind of deception.

CH: And are not out to their parents.

AM: Are not out. Yesterday I was admiring a couple of dogs on the street who were attached by a leash to a very handsome, hunky young guy.

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AM: He recognized me and told me he enjoyed my books. And I asked him if the dogs took much care and what he did with them when he had to go out of town on a business trip. And he said, "Well," and then he lowered his voice as if he were about to tell me something scandalous, and said, "I live with my ex lover." And then he caught himself and said, "I don't know why I'm whispering in San Francisco." And I said, "I sure as hell don't know why you are either, and I certainly don't know why you're whispering to me." And I walked away thinking he started out looking tremendously sexy to me and he ended up seeming like not a man at all. The only people on this planet who are truly attractive are the people who are confident about who they are and what they have to offer and have found something in themselves that they can love profoundly.

- CH: Yes, who have found some peace with that. Yeah.
- AM: Absolutely. And you know all of the desperation of these steroid pumped bodies at a white party in Miami can't cover up for is that emptiness and that insecurity. When people haven't come to terms with who they are.
- CH: Tell me about *More Tales of the City*. Is it being serialized now? Is it coming out soon?
- AM: It has already been filmed and will have its premier on Showtime on June 7th and 8th. They'll run three hours the first night and three hours the second night so it can be a real event and people can plan parties around it and that sort of thing. And we're also holding a number of sneak previews across the country under the auspices of GLAAD.
- CH: GLAAD being?
- AM: The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. There will be a premier in both Los Angeles and in San Francisco and a special showing at the Museum of Television in New York.
- CH: When can we expect to see it on our tv screens?
- AM: June 7th and 8th. And then it'll run all summer long on Showtime. So I would encourage people to get their Showtime subscriptions early and tell Showtime why you're subscribing because that would encourage them to continue with the series. Jerry Ofsay ???, the President of Programming, has already indicated publicly that they plan to follow these characters through the twelve years of their existence if there is an adequate response from the public.

Chris Hewitt—Transcription 3.25.98
Interview—Armistead Maupin

- CH: Ok, I'm pointing the mic at you because I have a loud voice, so...what I wanted to ask you was, you wrote about San Francisco in the 70's...
- AM: And into the 80's.
- CH: And in the 80's.
- AM: Yeah, I often, you know, now get described as someone who wrote about the pre-AIDS era in the 80's but in fact my novels are divided, the *Tales of the City* novels are half and half, pre-AIDS and post-AIDS.
- CH: What are the main changes you see in San Francisco since AIDS?
- AM: That's always a tough one to be glib about. So many of the changes have to do with changes in the city itself or changes in one's own life, the process of growing up. I will say that I've always resented the popularly held notion in the mainstream media that AIDS was the wakeup call for flighty, irresponsible gay men: the suggestion that AIDS was the thing that taught us how to love and have families and be connected to one another. We were perfectly adept at that before AIDS came along.
- CH: That's right.
- AM: I tried to reflect that in *More Tales of the City*, the novel that is currently being filmed, by showing a relationship in which one of the partners gets HIV and the other resolves to take care of him until he's better. We had a big discussion about that illness when we first started to film *More Tales* because some people felt that any discussion of illness in the late 70's would immediately cause the audience to think of AIDS, and that the audience in turn would either find a non-fatal illness to be anti-climactic or a cheat in some way. But I was determined that we keep the story line intact because I wanted to show that we've always been getting sick from all sorts of things and that many people have risen to the occasion. It's interesting in the two years since we discussed that aspect of the story the prospect for people with AIDS has changed so dramatically that the notion of an illness that doesn't prove to take a life is now far more acceptable than it would have been at the height of AIDS panic.
- CH: I moved here in 94 and I lived here 76 to 79. So when I came back, my friends from years ago said there's a pall over the city. And I personally didn't feel it. It felt pretty much the same to me. Of course I hadn't been here to lose so many friends to AIDS because I was in New York where there was a little bit of a lag in the virus, and the big crisis came there later in the 80s.

- AM: I used to bristle when I would go on book tours in Europe and other parts of the United States; and when the name San Francisco came up, the interviewer would invariably say, "That must be a really terrible place to live now." And there were several subtexts to that question. One suggested that the party was finally over and that we were getting our just desserts.
- CH: Yeah, that I hate.
- AM: The other subtext was that AIDS was only a reality in a place like San Francisco. So I spent most of my time having to say that this was a worldwide epidemic and that whoever was interviewing me should not make the mistake of distancing himself from what was happening in San Francisco.
- CH: Over and over again I've had to do...in reviews I say this is not a gay disease. Other people are getting it, have gotten it. Children die of it. You know, it is not specifically gay.
- AM: Well, there's always been a reason for people to want to distance themselves from the disease. In the old days, by that I mean the very early 80s, there were plenty of gay men running around saying, "I only go to sweater bars; therefore, I'm not likely to catch it." *Tales of the City* was the...rather *More Tales of the City* was the first place that...let me see, how do I phrase this? Because I was writing the serial on a daily basis in the *Chronicle*, I could reflect day-to-day events as they happened, and I was able to react to AIDS as soon as it came into my life. So when a very close friend of mine died of AIDS, of pneumocystis pneumonia specifically, in 1982, I made the decision to include AIDS as part of the story line in *Tales of the City*. So when John Fielding was shown to have died off-stage in the beginning of that novel, he became the first AIDS death in the history of fiction. The epidemic had not been written about in a fictional way anywhere else before that time.
- CH: Not even in plays really. I mean I saw *Falsettos*, and they never say it's AIDS in *Falsettos*. The guy dies, and you think, "What's he dying of?" And there's an assumption because they're gay. But that's the only assumption. The word is never mentioned.
- AM: I don't know the date of *Falsettos*. I think there were probably some plays that preceded my work. And I'm proud of the fact that I was out of the gate so early, but it was really an accident because I had a forum that allowed me to comment on whatever was affecting my life. I was able to do the same thing with the Anita Bryant anti-gay crusade only a day after she announced the launch of her "Save Our Children" campaign.
- CH: If you have to have AIDS, this is the best place to have it. I know it sounds like a terrible thing to say...
- AM: I think if you have to have anything, this is the best place to have it. Because this is a city that recognizes diversity. That is a much maligned word these

days, but it does in fact celebrate and overlook human differences as well as any place on earth.

CH: Right, this is why I'm here.

AM: My friend, Tamara Detreaux, who inspired *Maybe the Moon* said she was far more comfortable in San Francisco than she was anywhere in the world because people simply accepted who she was and did not heap inordinate amounts of scorn or pity on her.

CH: People get beneath the surface quicker I think. You're just a person. On the outside, appearance isn't very important.

AM: When you live in a place that literally confuses you as to the nature of human identity and sexuality and gender, you start examining the human heart more closely for its contents. It's just that simple.

CH: And there's more openness. You know I've found a big difference between here and New York where if you've already lived here and then live in New York, it's such a shock to see how positive life is for gays and how prejudicial it is over there compared to here. I felt much more patronized. I found it much more difficult to come out to people there. I felt much more of a freak. I got more stares and experienced more prejudiced behavior there than I do here. Even though there of course the arty gays may all think they're terribly out and terribly liberal.

AM: I was shocked when I went to New York in the late 70s because I was so full of myself as a recently out gay man that I thought surely everyone in this great metropolitan center would be celebrating this with me. And I felt as if I had farted in an elevator whenever I casually happened to mention my homosexuality. And I'm talking about a group of people who fancy themselves tremendously liberal and sophisticated. I also discovered that a large number of famous gay people in New York went to public social events with a beard as a date. And while people prided themselves on knowing privately that someone was gay, they found it perfectly alright for them to keep up the pretense of heterosexuality. So my impatience with the closet was regarded as bad manners, and it still is in certain circles.

CH: Right...I'm giving a reading at Grace Cathedral next week. Somebody wanted to bring...some straight married couples and their children who are affected by my bone condition which is called *osteogenesis imperfecta*. And I thought that would be wonderful...

AM: Is this similar to brittle bone disease?

CH: That's what it is. And the person who invited me said, "Will there be anything that isn't 'Family Values?'"

- AM: (Laughing) By which they meant, "Are you going to turn into a big queer in front of us?"
- CH: Am I going to come in a dress? And so...I said, "I'm not going to make the pretense that I'm not gay. I'm not going to cut out the bits of my autobiography where I talk about a boyfriend or having a crush on a teacher."
- AM: Of course not, and I wouldn't think that anyone at Grace Cathedral would mind if you did either. They certainly shouldn't; half of them are queers themselves.
- CH: Well, it's just that there is an osteogenesis imperfecta foundation which tends to be centered around the nuclear family from the suburbs basically.
- AM: I was fascinated to discover when I was the keynote speaker at the Little People of America convention several years ago that that organization is ruled by a very heavily Republican conservative core. And that the little people who are queer within that organization have to have their own subculture which is very secretive.
- CH: Which is why I don't go to them actually. I think it's a wonderful idea getting us together, but on the other hand not if I'm going to have to shock everybody.
- AM: I was whisked off to a side room at the Marriott Hotel in Denver by several little people who brought in the one out lesbian in the organization who played me a tune on the guitar. And six or eight of us and their significant others sat there and had what amounted to a cell meeting of queers. And I completely horrified the group, and by the group I mean the entire organization, in the course of my address...I horrified the larger assembly of the organization when I told them I was delighted to see that they had brought their children there and making them feel comfortable about who they were, and that I hope they would extend that to their sexuality. Because some of those very children that were there today are going to grow up to be gay kids, are going to grow up to be gay. And they're going to need your understanding about that just as certainly as they're going to need your guidance because of their size.
- CH: That's why I'm writing my book. Not only are there hardly any books about little people, I've never seen one about a little gay person.
- AM: No, I don't think there is one personally. I actually had someone come up to me in a bookstore in New York and say, "When are you going to do that?"
- CH: What got you interested in little people?
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I'm not sure how long she held it or who put her in the Guinness Book. I knew her ever since a day we met on a bay cruise when she was nineteen years old. And one day she called me up and said she was going to run away from home, which was in San Leandro, and seek her fortune in Hollywood. And she told me she wanted my blessing. So I told her I would give it to her if she called me with regular reports. For a long time, she didn't get work. She worked as a DJ in a punk disco in the valley. And for awhile, she sang backup to Bud Court when he had a group called *Bud Court and the Midflies*. And then one day she called up and said, "I can't believe I'm telling you this, but I have a role in Steven Spielberg's next film." And she had been sworn to secrecy so it took me several months before I found out that she had been chosen to wear the rubber suit of ET in all the scenes that required movement on the part of ET. And yet, this was a very curious kind of theme, because her face was never seen, and in fact she was simply providing the life for a creature who would get all the glory. After talking to her for awhile, I realized that an awful lot of little people in Hollywood are employed in just this way. And I was intrigued by the notion of exploring the implied metaphor in that. The idea that some people are acceptable only if they wear rubber suits and charm us. And I think almost everybody has some sort of rubber suit that he or she feels that he must wear.

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- AM: It has already been filmed and will have its premier on Showtime on June 7th and 8th. They'll run three hours the first night and three hours the second night so it can be a real event and people can plan parties around it and that sort of thing. And we're also holding a number of sneak previews across the country under the auspices of GLAAD.
- CH: GLAAD being?
- AM: The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. There will be a premier in both Los Angeles and in San Francisco and a special showing at the Museum of Television in New York.
- CH: When can we expect to see it on our tv screens?
- AM: June 7th and 8th. And then it'll run all summer long on Showtime. So I would encourage people to get their Showtime subscriptions early and tell Showtime why you're subscribing because that would encourage them to continue with the series. Jerry Ofsay ???, the President of Programming, has already indicated publicly that they plan to follow these characters through the twelve years of their existence if there is an adequate response from the public.

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Chris Hewitt—Transcription
Interview with Ruth Felt

Chris : Tell me first how you got interested in the idea of helping the AIDS
Hewitt project, that kind of thing. Why did you come to contact them?

Ruth: Well of course in terms of specifically *Classical Action*, it was because of
Felt my close relationship with Charles Hamlen who founded *Classical Action*.

CH: Right.

RF: And my respect for Charlie and everything that he wanted to do in
engaging the classical performing arts in the fight against AIDS. And I
was one of the first people as a presenter that he spoke to about his
decision to do this. And I was very honored to accept a place on the
Board of *Classical Action* in its beginning, in its very first year.

CH: How long have you been helping to direct *San Francisco Performances*
then?

RF: Well, I founded *San Francisco Performances* in 1979/80. And I met
Charlie Hamlen then in that very beginning, because he had just
started his own artist management in 1978. So, we got to know each
other kind of in the beginning stages of our business.

CH: How long have you been associated with them then?

RF: *Classical Action*? Since its beginning. And I think this is now the fifth
year.

CH: How many concerts a year do you do connected with them?

RF: Well, we have a challenge program in which we invite every artist that
we present and ask them to consider donating a percentage of their fee
that we pay them to *Classical Action* and *San Francisco Performances* will
match that contribution. And every season I would say that maybe 15
to 20 of the artists that we present participate in the program. And
we've been giving overall, in terms of this challenge program, over
\$50,000 a season I would think.

CH: Do people say no ever?

RF: Well, they do. They say not no to the idea of supporting the AIDS fight
but saying support this in other ways. What I have found from the
artists that have responded to it is that they feel that this is a wonderful

way for them to participate and to do it in a way in which it gives awareness to the public as well as giving them an on-going avenue to raise funds for this cause. And certainly some of the artists that are very close to *San Francisco Performances*, namely Andre Watts and Thomas Hampson and Anne Sophie-Mutter, have been from very beginning generous donors to the Classical Action fight.

CH: I notice people aren't wearing their little red ribbons as much as they used to. And why do you think that is? Do you think that's good or bad or...?

RF: I don't know why, Chris; and I guess I do believe that keeping up the awareness to the general public of people who support this cause and the fight against AIDS is really important. I suppose you've seen the nice *Classical Action* logo, and the jewelry that's been designed for it? I always wear mine. I've got it on my jacket right now.

CH: Because, you know, we can't let up in the struggle. It's not over.

RF: No. It certainly is not.

CH: People are still dying of AIDS.

RF:: Oh, yeah, and there's no cure.

CH: That's right.

RF:: And the thing that is so frightening, I feel, in terms of the general public's awareness is that there is still a perception out there by too many people that they're not at risk. That's very foolhardy and that's very stupid.

CH: Have you had any bad reaction in the sense that, has anybody said, "Oh, when these artists talk about AIDS, it's just a way of showing how benevolent they are. They're not really particularly interested, it's just a way of kind of showing off, you know. Some people point out the red ribbon and scoff at it, which I find very hard to understand.

RF: I've not experienced that with the artists that we present because I feel like the arts community has been affected so greatly by this disease. And so many artists have very close colleagues that have died or have the disease. So, I haven't experienced that with artists really at all. I think what I have seen in the greater community or the general public is sometimes a perception that or just a statement that, "Well, I think too much money is going to the AIDS fight. We've got cancer. We've got everything else, you know. It's just too much attention." So, I've heard that.

- CH: Cause we don't want a backlash. That's the thing. That's what I'm a little concerned about.
- RF: But see that for me, that's one way in which major performing artists, their commitment and the continuing commitment to the fight against AIDS is making a very strong statement to the general public.
- CH: Tell me a little bit about this concert and how it came about.
- RF: Well, the concert on March 2nd was a second *Classical Action* concert in San Francisco. Now were you here, Chris, when we had the big one three years ago in which *San Francisco Performances*, the Opera, the Symphony, and the Ballet were a part of it?
- CH: I wasn't able to get there, no.
- RF: Well, that took place in both the Opera House and Symphony Hall, and it was a much bigger event because of the size of the Halls and all that. And a major success. Really kind of one of the first big Classical Action benefits; and it raised nearly over I think \$800,000 for the cause. And it was really the first time that all four arts organizations had collaborated on a benefit, which was a statement in itself. So then *Classical Action* and the San Francisco AIDS Foundation wanted to do another event in San Francisco to keep up the momentum and the spirit of this fight with classical performing arts, but they knew that they weren't going to be able to organize such a big event so soon. So my understanding is that Charlie Hamlen met with the AIDS Foundation and they decided they would like to do a very nice but smaller, more intimate event. And then very nicely decided they would like to honor me and San Francisco Performances for our leadership in music, in presenting music and also in the AIDS fight. And do it at the Herbst Theater which was the theater we use most of the time and to have a major fund-raiser again, which it turned out to be. And then I worked with Charlie on putting together the performance based on the artists that we present and have a very close tie to us.
- CH: I love the way it was presented. It was rather like an old musical hall with turns, you know, with the mcs and so on. It was so informal, which you don't get very often on the classical music scene. And also what was nice was the mixture of jazz and pop and classical.
- RF: What it did was reflected specifically the art forms that we specialize in which is the recital with the song recital being one, a piano recital and then our string quartet, the Alexander String Quartet, and of course jazz. Fred Hirsch, he's a wonderful jazz pianist, and we've presented Fred several times and he's coming back next year. And then Steven Petronio who is one of our dancers in residence. And our focus in

dance is all very contemporary, you know very avant garde contemporary dance. So, that was sort of the way the program was put together.

CH: Right, because so often classical music performance seems so distant from the audience. And it was very touching, I thought, when Stockard Channing and Lisa Brogan made reference to the AIDS struggle in a way that couldn't have been done by artists just coming to perform. Even though that what's we were there for we were also there for other reasons. And I thought that was very touching that they were able to do that. That there was a specific reason why we were there.

RF: Absolutely. It was a way to reinforce the fact that this was put together raise funds for this important cause, and these artists all came and made very amazing efforts to do this. I mean, Dawn Upshaw for example, flew in from New York the night before. She got in at, I don't know, 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock. First thing on Monday morning she had a meeting at 8:15, she was on the radio from 10 to 11 with Jean-Yves about this program. She rehearsed with him from 11:30 to 1:30 at the Opera House. She went back to the hotel for a short time, came back to the theater for the rehearsal and the lighting, and then was there for the entire duration and then went up and met some of the donors after the performance, left for Los Angeles the next morning to start a rehearsal in Los Angeles. I think all of the artists were on that kind of a schedule where they were just so willing to donate their time and fit it into an already incredibly busy touring schedule.

CH: How did it feel being honored like that?

RF: Well, it was very nice, but I guess people say I'm kind of shy in some ways and so I was very proud and in the anticipation of it, I was a little nervous, to be honest. But once I arrived at the event, and the dinner and at the concert, and with all the artists and all the people. I felt wonderful.

CH: To see the fruits of your labor.

RF: And I was very proud. I mean, it was a very distinctive honor. The San Francisco AIDS Foundation did a beautiful job in making all of the arrangements for the dinner, and Stanley Gotti did the décor. I don't know if you saw the tulips and the beautiful décor. It was absolutely gorgeous. And the fundraising that the AIDS Foundation really spearheaded in terms of all the sponsorships. You know they raised \$325,000. And they exceeded their goal.

CH: That's wonderful.

- RF: And then Charlie and of course *Classical Action* put together all of the artists and all of the program. So it was a very very special event.
- CH: Are there any upcoming concerts that we should be aware of?
- RF: That we're presenting?
- CH: Yeah, especially with regard to *Classical Action*. Do you have some more coming up?
- RF: Well, we have a lot of concerts coming up and a number of artists have already told me that they are donating some of their fee to *Classical Action*. For instance, on March 22nd, the baritone Bo Skovkus, made his debut. He was just with the opera in the fall, but he's making his San Francisco recital debut with us. And he and the pianist that works with him, Warren Jones, whom we've presented many times, they're both donating a percentage of their fee to *Classical Action*. And Thomas Hampson, who is coming up in May, May 31st, is a major supporter of *Classical Action*, always makes a major donation which we match, and Anne Sophie-Mutter is also coming up at Davies Hall in May, and she is making a contribution. Made a major contribution the last time she was in America. She designated a significant gift in connection with every concert she gave on that tour two years ago. And then I think in terms of...I don't remember them all, Chris, but a number of the artists that we still have coming up have designated a percentage of their fee to the cause.
- CH: Is there anything else you'd like to tell me? Where do you go from here?
- RF: In terms of *Classical Action*, I'm just very thrilled with what just happened again with this beautiful event. And so in San Francisco we want to continue to do more special performances with artists, whether they be house concerts or another bigger concert...whatever, to keep the fundraising going which is so necessary, but also to really keep the message out there of how important it is to not believe that this is solved. Because it isn't solved at all. And then in terms of just the working with *San Francisco Performances* for me, this kind of partnership with *Classical Action* and the AIDS Foundation and those kinds of working relationships for things that are so important in our lives are just really what is inspiring.
- CH: *Classical Action* has now joined forces with *Equity Fights AIDS* which has now become—
- RF: *Broadway Cares*.

CH: How did that come about?

RF: Well it came about because, of course *Equity/Broadway Cares* is a very successful organization in the theater in the AIDS fight. And Charlie and Deborah Edison of Classical Action staff had been renting office space from them right in the same building. It seemed to Charlie in working with Broadway Cares in terms of just their office space, that of course in any organization there are so many administrative things that everyone has whether it's accounting or just basic reporting and different things you have to take care of, nuts and bolts of any business. And so it made sense for *Classical Action* to join with Broadway Cares so that those services are not being duplicated. So what it allows *Classical Action* to do is have a lot of those nuts and bolts be actually handled together with Broadway Cares and gives Charlie the time to really go out and do what he does best which is organizing artists and events that raise funds.

CH: *Classical Action* is throughout the country now?

RF: Yes, Charlie left here to go to Seattle the day after our event, and they are planning a big event in Seattle. They're having one coming up in Minneapolis, and there are several more being planned for New York.

CH: They also sponsor CD's, right?

RF: Yes, Fred Hirsch has put out another CD that's another jazz CD. And the first one raised over \$300,000 for *Classical Action*.

CH: That's great. I might review that.

RF: Have you had a chance to talk with Charlie, Chris?...You could give him a call in New York. Yeah at the *Classical Action* offices. He's a very special person.

CH: Is there anything else you want to say?

RF: No, basically I'm very pleased to do this interview because I believe so strongly in this whole purpose. I just very much want to encourage the people who are involved in it, committed to the arts to also join us in this special cause.

CH: And to show also that classical music is not just some stuffy thing that stuffy people do.

RF: That's right.

- CH: And don't care about national issues. Because, you know, a lot of big rock concerts, for instance, have given money to AIDS. But it isn't very often that we have something like this.
- RF: Right, and that's another reason why I think so many classical artists, major artists have been so supportive, because *Classical Action* and the way it is organized gives them a way in which they can participate in the fight on an ongoing basis. And they were really looking for a way. And there have been events in New York like the Juilliard String Quartet did an event recently. The Tokyo Quartet several years ago did all the Beethoven quartets in six concerts, three at Carnegie Hall, three at Lincoln Center, and all the proceeds went to *Classical Action*. So, there's a lot going on, and it's really very admirable.
- CH: Ok, thank you, Ruth.
- RF: You're welcome.

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Review:

Gala Concert honoring Ruth Felt, Herbst Theater, San Francisco, March 2nd
by Christopher Hewitt

It was like being given bunch after bunch of summer roses on a grey winter's day. The unconventional format of this concert — each artist or group of artists performing in rotation, each “turn” introduced by a mistress of ceremonies, Stockard Channing and later Lisa Brogan, star of *Phantom of the Opera*, added to the excitement and party-like atmosphere of the occasion. It was indeed a celebration, a musical “thank you” to the worthy Miss Felt, founder of San Francisco Performances, the most prestigious concert series here in the City, and co-founder of Classical Action, the organization which organizes concerts at which the performers donate part of their fees to AIDS charities, but it was also a celebration of musical diversity — Jazz, chamber music, song recital and dance. The biggest discovery and delight for me was the subtle and brilliant playing of jazz pianist Fred Hirsch who improvised on a number of well-known standards of the thirties and forties including “Nearer to you.” He wove elaborate embellishments around the melodies with a delicacy reminiscent of Bill Evans and the masculine passion of Oscar Peterson. Yet Mr. Hirsch has a style all his own — like the leaves of a climbing plant on a trellis, his notes intensify the poignant romanticism of these love songs. I couldn't help flashing back on the highs and lows of my own past love affairs as he played. He is the master of the bitter-sweet — a rarity in these days of mechanical rhythms and violent lyrics.

Hirsch also proved himself a splendid accompanist to Dawn Upshaw as she sang the Rogers and Hart standards “Manhattan,” “It never entered my mind” and Gershwin's “Do. Do. Do.” Though classically trained as an opera singer (she has performed many times at the Metropolitan Opera and other great opera houses throughout the world) she is equally at home performing music of a lighter vein. She is the consummate performer — charming and warm, conveying to the audience at all times her sheer joy in singing. She is also a fine actress — In her renderings of Canterloubé's *Songs of the Auvergne*,” settings of folk songs from that region of France, she became the persona of the folk-singers.

Particularly effective was her version of one song in which a village girl refuses to get up until, she tells her brother, he finds her a new boyfriend. Here Miss Upshaw played the village girl with charm and humor. She both touched the audience and made them laugh despite the fact that most of us were not familiar obviously with the unusual dialect of auvergnois French. These songs, originally recorded by Natania Davrat in the early seventies, have maintained their early popularity and are well worth a listen. They are wistful, humorous and thoroughly delightful.

The “hot” new French classical pianist, Jean-Ives Thibaudet, provided evocative backgrounds to the songs. Later in the program he gave stunning renderings of three nocturnes and three études by Chopin, including the famous and finger-torturing “Revolutionary Study.” He played with great passion and control. He could be forgiven his one wrong note as the house manager could be forgiven the one stray mouse which flitted in and out the side aisles during the études. On this night the beauty of the music and the brilliance of the performances carried us in a wave of joy.

The Alexander String Quartet, artists-in-residence at San Francisco State University, and a local treasure here, gave tender, delicate performances of a Schubert Quartet, The Quartet in C-minor (D.703) — and Gershwin's rarely heard “Lullaby.” They played with precision and crispness but were never overly academic. They deserve to be better known (recording companies take note!). They work splendidly as a unit — the artists are all close friends as well as colleagues, which no doubt accounts for their smooth blending of tone and precision of timing.

Because I was to review this event I got in for free, but even if I had paid the \$150 for my ticket which by the way included admission to the lavish reception where one could meet the artists and sample the delicious hors d'oeuvres, I would have felt it was money well spent — actually over \$80,000 was raised for AIDS charities in the San Francisco area by this concert alone. Thank you, Classical Action, thank you performers, and above all, thank you Miss Felt.

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Christopher: Here is the transcription. I transcribed it myself and there are some words or phrases that I could not make out (I marked them with a row of ?????). You will probably be able to make them out by listening to the tape again. If it's easier, you can edit the piece from this and send me the cuts and changes on the page. I guess you need a lead-in also. Word length is 800-900 words. Call with questions/concerns. Chael

Paul Reed
By Chris Hewitt

CH: First of all, congratulations on the book. I really liked it and it's really readable. I couldn't put it down. The first thing that struck me was when the protagonist—can I ask you something? Is this autobiographical? Or semi-autobiographical?

PR: Semi-autobiographical. I write like Ed White as far as forcing autobiography into fiction.

CH: One thing that struck me was when you talked about “compassion for ???” I've never heard that phrase before. Could you explain a little a bit?

PR: I heard that phrase a few years ago in reference to the homeless. People were just fed up with the insolvability of the problem and the place where compassion was completely gone. That point where you reach where it's like you don't want to help anymore because nothing is going to help.

CH: Do you feel that way yourself?

PR: Occasionally from time to time about different things—sure.

CH: How about AIDS though?

PR: No, I'm still thoroughly involved with my own case of AIDS. I don't feel like that at all.

CH: What I liked about the book is that it deals with AIDS as it is today. And it forces the reader to realize that it's still around. I had a big argument with someone from ACT UP when they were saying a few weeks ago AIDS is over. I tore flyers off a building.

PR: You must have been talking to one of those lunatics.

CH: Exactly. And I wrote an article about it for A&U. I was so furious. And everybody in your book is dealing with AIDS in one way or another.

PR: Everybody in the book is—that's true. One thing I wanted to show is that everybody is dealing with some sort of a problem. Because there's nobody in there who doesn't have a problem whether it has to do with AIDS or the black woman getting cancer. Part of it is that I wanted to write a book that was a slice of life. And that's where the autobiography part comes in a lot because if I look around me in my life and I realize "character" in my life has one kind of problem one after another whether it's depression, AIDS, being HIV-positive, or breast cancer. They're all grappling with these [problems] and this ideal that you get—from advertising or somewhere—that we should be smiling and happy and healthy and good is just totally off the mark.

CH: What is your feeling now about medication?

PR: The more the merrier.

CH: Which is the complete opposite of ACT UP [San Francisco].

PR: Well, they're crazy.

CH: Obviously we need medications that don't have so many side effects. And aren't so over-priced. But I have many friends who are still alive today and leading productive lives who wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the medications.

PR: I was one of those deathbed recoveries. I was really sick in 1985—I had everything you could imagine. I was wasting away and transfusion dependent (?), hemolipoglymia (?), crypto ciridiosis (?) and MAC. I got on the protease inhibitors—the old saquinavir—and it was literally like rising off my deathbed. Within two months, I was back to a normal life.

CH: Were you able to write during this time?

PR: Yeah, I always write. I can't not write. I go crazy if I don't write.

CH: I was just wondering about the energy level.

PR: Well, I find it somehow.

One thing that's not autobiographical—one thing that I found interesting to do to the main character—was I made his sobriety a little dubious. I thought "This is going to be more interesting for the character."

CH: So the character doesn't come across as too saintly. I liked that. He had his own foibles. He wasn't quite trustworthy—that's how I felt. I liked that because it was more real. You have so many books—you know you have the hero as protagonist and everybody else falls short in a way. I liked this guy because he was so human. And there were times when he was just a raunchy queen.

PR: Actually I tried to do that with a lot of the characters in the book. Make them contradict themselves. Because that's what people do—they change their minds, they're of two or three minds at once. Usually characters in books have a party line that they follow—they don't double-back on themselves.

CH: I love the fights between Scottie and Ken. It's funny—but you can see how they're running circles around themselves. And they end up chasing each other's tails in a way—arguing the other person's point of view back at them. I remember it was so real—funny—but it was real. I felt like I was eavesdropping—just like the character does.

PR: It's very real because there isn't a gay couple in the world who doesn't go through some sort of a process about monogamy and all that other stuff.

CH: Complicated by the virus of course. My last boyfriend wouldn't get tested so I said, "Okay, no sex until you get tested." And he had a fit. But I put my foot down and said, "I'm sorry but I'm not going to take that risk." Even if it's only oral sex. I have a friend who contracted it through oral sex. So I'm not taking that risk.

PR: Are you negative?

CH: Yes.

PR: Well, the last thing you would need is seroconverting.

CH: Right. Exactly. I have a lot to deal with—being in a wheelchair and having had two strokes. The last thing I need is HIV. The funny thing is—this person is a doctor. And sometimes they're the last ones to be aware.... I've taken a lot of risks with boyfriends, who turned out to be negative. God knows why.

How much do you think the book is relevant to San Francisco and how much is relevant to the whole country? Based on the characters. The characters are clearly—they could have walked off of Castro Street.

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Anything else you'd like to say about the book?

PR: Buy it.

CH: I'm sure they will.

\$16.00
FICTION

Here, with *Vertical Intercourse*, comes Paul Reed's long-awaited third novel, a stunning, stylish, and deeply moving tale of nine friends. Set in San Francisco — with all the haunting lyricism for which Reed is known — this novel examines the beauty of romance, the challenges of relationships, and confrontations with the past.

As the novel opens, the narrator is meeting with his new therapist for the first time, hoping to find meaning as he approaches his fortieth birthday. His rich social life involves an intriguing group of men and women, each filled with enthusiasm and the joy of living fully, despite difficulties and setbacks — from the ebullient young woman called "Mad Mama," to AIDS patient Michael, and the narrator's housemates and best friend Charlton, an older gentleman with all the wisdom and grace of having seen it all.

But the inevitable challenges of life intervene, and each character must confront the meaning of aging in the gay community, of health crises beyond the epidemic, of masculinity, dashed dreams, and hope.

PAUL REED is the author of more than a dozen books, including the novels *Facing It* and *Longing*. He is also the author of the nonfiction books *Serenity*, *The Q Journal*, and *The Savage Garden*. Writing under the penname of Max Exander, he has authored five volumes of gay men's erotica. He lives in San Francisco, Healdsburg, and Miami. He can be reached via the website www.paulreed.com.



STEVE SAVAGE



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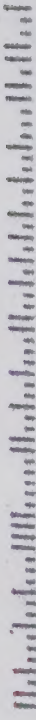
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Christopher: Here is the transcription. I transcribed it myself and there are some words or phrases that I could not make out (I marked them with a row of ?????). You will probably be able to make them out by listening to the tape again. If it's easier, you can edit the piece from this and send me the cuts and changes on the page. I guess you need a lead-in also. Word length is 800-900 words. Call with questions/concerns. Chael

Paul Reed
By Chris Hewitt

CH: First of all, congratulations on the book. I really liked it and it's really readable. I couldn't put it down. The first thing that struck me was when the protagonist—can I ask you something? Is this autobiographical? Or semi-autobiographical?

PR: Semi-autobiographical. I write like Ed White as far as forcing autobiography into fiction.

CH: One thing that struck me was when you talked about "compassion for ???" I've never heard that phrase before. Could you explain a little a bit?

PR: I heard that phrase a few years ago in reference to the homeless. People were just fed up with the insolvability of the problem and the place where compassion was completely gone. That point where you reach where it's like you don't want to help anymore because nothing is going to help.

CH: Do you feel that way yourself?

PR: Occasionally from time to time about different things—sure.

CH: How about AIDS though?

PR: No, I'm still thoroughly involved with my own case of AIDS. I don't feel like that at all.

CH: What I liked about the book is that it deals with AIDS as it is today. And it forces the reader to realize that it's still around. I had a big argument with someone from ACT UP when they were saying a few weeks ago AIDS is over. I tore flyers off a building.

PR: You must have been talking to one of those lunatics.

CH: Exactly. And I wrote an article about it for A&U. I was so furious. And everybody in your book is dealing with AIDS in one way or another.

PR: Everybody in the book is—that's true. One thing I wanted to show is that everybody is dealing with some sort of a problem. Because there's nobody in there who doesn't have a problem whether it has to do with AIDS or the black woman getting cancer. Part of it is that I wanted to write a book that was a slice of life. And that's where the autobiography part comes in a lot because if I look around me in my life and I realize "character" in my life has one kind of problem one after another whether it's depression, AIDS, being HIV-positive, or breast cancer. They're all grappling with these [problems] and this ideal that you get—from advertising or somewhere—that we should be smiling and happy and healthy and good is just totally off the mark.

CH: What is your feeling now about medication?

PR: The more the merrier.

CH: Which is the complete opposite of ACT UP [San Francisco].

PR: Well, they're crazy.

CH: Obviously we need medications that don't have so many side effects. And aren't so over-priced. But I have many friends who are still alive today and leading productive lives who wouldn't be here if it wasn't for the medications.

PR: I was one of those deathbed recoveries. I was really sick in 1985—I had everything you could imagine. I was wasting away and transfusion dependent (?), hemolipoglymia (?), crypto ciridiosis (?) and MAC. I got on the protease inhibitors—the old saquinavir—and it was literally like rising off my deathbed. Within two months, I was back to a normal life.

CH: Were you able to write during this time?

PR: Yeah, I always write. I can't not write. I go crazy if I don't write.

CH: I was just wondering about the energy level.

PR: Well, I find it somehow.

One thing that's not autobiographical—one thing that I found interesting to do to the main character—was I made his sobriety a little dubious. I thought "This is going to be more interesting for the character."

CH: So the character doesn't come across as too saintly. I liked that. He had his own foibles. He wasn't quite trustworthy—that's how I felt. I liked that because it was more real. You have so many books—you know you have the hero as protagonist and everybody else falls short in a way. I liked this guy because he was so human. And there were times when he was just a raunchy queen.

PR: Actually I tried to do that with a lot of the characters in the book. Make them contradict themselves. Because that's what people do—they change their minds, they're of two or three minds at once. Usually characters in books have a party line that they follow—they don't double-back on themselves.

CH: I love the fights between Scottie and Ken. It's funny—but you can see how they're running circles around themselves. And they end up chasing each other's tails in a way—arguing the other person's point of view back at them. I remember it was so real—funny—but it was real. I felt like I was eavesdropping—just like the character does.

PR: It's very real because there isn't a gay couple in the world who doesn't go through some sort of a process about monogamy and all that other stuff.

CH: Complicated by the virus of course. My last boyfriend wouldn't get tested so I said, "Okay, no sex until you get tested." And he had a fit. But I put my foot down and said, "I'm sorry but I'm not going to take that risk." Even if it's only oral sex. I have a friend who contracted it through oral sex. So I'm not taking that risk.

PR: Are you negative?

CH: Yes.

PR: Well, the last thing you would need is seroconverting.

CH: Right. Exactly. I have a lot to deal with—being in a wheelchair and having had two strokes. The last thing I need is HIV. The funny thing is—this person is a doctor. And sometimes they're the last ones to be aware....I've taken a lot of risks with boyfriends, who turned out to be negative. God knows why.

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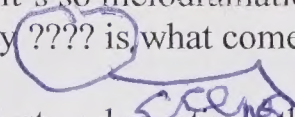
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